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# S. African bounties lure Namibians in war on SWAPO

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OSHAKATI, Namibia — The focus of South Africa's war against guerrillas of the South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) has shifted from battlefield victories to winning the "hearts and minds" of Namibians.

But South African intelligence officers are not convinced that, after defeating SWAPO in the field, they are winning the equally important effort to gain the support of the local population.

"If it comes to the punch and they have to decide, I think they [the Namibians] will go for SWAPO," South African intelligence officers said in a briefing at this northern army headquarters.

"They [Namibians] are convinced SWAPO is fighting for real independence of the country," said the Rev. F. Henning, vicar-general of the Catholic Diocese of Namibia. But, he added, "I think they are more anti-South Africa than pro-SWAPO."

At Eenhana, headquarters of the 54th Battalion, the relative strengths of the opposing forces were shown recently on an area map. Three major SWAPO infiltration routes are marked and more than half the population was rated as being anti-South African.

In the past two years, South Africa has inaugurated a campaign to win the "hearts and minds" of the population in Ovamboland, the north central district where half of Namibia's 1 million people live and where the war is the hardest fought.

It also is the heartland of support for SWAPO, which grew out of the Ovambo Peoples' Organization more than two decades ago.

And, to a large degree, South Africa's resort to courting the support of the people has been caused by continued strong SWAPO support in Ovamboland, where every family is felt to have a member in the organization.

In Ovamboland, while South African troops seek to track SWAPO guerrillas across miles of flat, sandy, scrubby tracts of bush, they also try

to win over a population through a combination of civic action programs that include teaching, technical schools and agriculture schemes.

Increasingly, the war against SWAPO is being fought by Namibians, particularly locally raised ethnic battalions, and the special police unit Koevoet, which includes former guerrillas, has been credited with most of the "kills" in the fighting.

Since 1980, Pretoria has built up the Territorial Force, yet Namibia's military relies heavily on regular South African army units and air force for logistics and support and South African officers for command.

In the Ovambo battalion stationed near Oshakati there is one black officer. In the 10-year-old Bushman battalion all officers are South African.

South Africa's most controversial unit is Koevoet — Afrikaans for "crowbar" — which has been accused by opponents of continued atrocities. Listed as a "heavy" battalion of 1,200-1,500 men, Koevoet uses captured guerrillas to help track SWAPO bands through miles of bush.

Today, in an effort to lessen South Africa's military role, Ovambo and Bushmen battalions, along with Koevoet, are used to hunt SWAPO and an estimated 55 percent of forces in Namibia are locally raised units. In the operational area along the Angolan border, 60 percent of troops are local.

While strength figures are not released, army units are thought to total about 20,000, with most deployed along the 900-mile Angolan border.

Most of the war, though, is fought in Ovamboland, and South African officers rattle off statistics to bolster their claims of success. They say about 12,000 SWAPO guerrillas have

been killed in the past seven years of fighting.

SWAPO's armed wing, the Peoples' Liberation Army of Namibia, "is not an effective military organization," according to South African officers, who say the group has only 8,500 men remaining in Angola.

But SWAPO denies that South Africa is winning the war, pointing to national conscription, dusk-to-dawn curfews in the operational areas, a recently introduced permit system for the north and east of the country and the continued presence of South African troops in Namibia.

"These are definitely not a sign of winning a war," SWAPO spokesman Philip Tjerije said in Windhoek.

Among South African tactics are an increasing use of cash rewards. Yet while claiming a "remarkable willingness of the people to associate with the security forces," officers say much of the cooperation is motivated by the desire to receive some of the \$125,000 paid out annually for information leading to the capture of a guerrilla or weapons.

In a country with a per-capita income of \$700, the rewards are sizable. The reward for a landmine is \$500, a rifle is worth \$250 and \$5,000 is paid for a SWAPO detachment

commander. "The idea here is to use money to buy SWAPO out of the war," one intelligence officer said.

Despite punishing cross-border forays into southern Angola, South African intelligence officers are expecting an upswing in SWAPO activity at the end of the year once SWAPO has adjusted to South Africa's recent pullout.

The officers estimate SWAPO's strength inside Namibia at only several hundred. In many aspects the war has become a very personal one, with South African officers knowing the exact number and names of guerrillas in their region.

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Yet, despite the claims of victory in the field, South Africa's military commitment in Namibia remains massive and controversial, costing several hundred million dollars annually and is of growing concern at home.

A political settlement leading to Namibian independence remains as elusive today as a decade ago. South African intelligence officers continue to count about 30 "incidents" a month, and planes fly at tree-top level to avoid any possible SAM-7 missile attack, evidence that SWAPO remains a military force to be reckoned with.